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DAMN (SOMEONE) WITH FAINT PRAISE

to criticize in such a way that one appears to be praising when in fact one is condemning or disapproving

1. Jeff told me that the diet I was trying was showing results, and he asked how much more weight I had to lose. He was really telling me that I'm still too fat. He was *damning me with faint praise*.
2. Alicia told me that she was never able to make her old shoes last more than a few years the way I could. She was really trying to point out that my shoes were old and that hers are not. She *damned me with faint praise*.

Compare to: *backhanded compliment*

In this idiom the word 'faint' means weak or feeble.

DARK HORSE

a competitor who is little-known by most people but who is expected to win by someone more knowledgeable

1. The voters know very little about Mr. Johnson, but he's a *dark horse* and I think he'll win the election.
2. At the racetrack, we placed our money on a horse most people had never seen before, but was expected to do well. He was a *dark horse* in the race.

The expression originates from horse racing jargon. It is often used to mean a surprise candidate in a political election.

DAWN ON (SOMEONE)

to realize something that was perhaps already apparent to others

1. I was surprised that there was so little traffic in the morning and that I was the first one to arrive at work. When no one else had shown up by 8:30, it finally *dawned on me* that it was a holiday.
2. A man came to Tom's house yesterday asking all sorts of questions about Tom's schedule. I asked Tom why it hadn't *dawned on him* that the man may have been a thief checking when Tom would be away from home.

Similar to: *see the light*

The expression suggests that the dawn reveals a situation. *See the light* simply means to understand, whereas *dawn on someone* suggests that one has been blind or slow to understand.

DAYS ARE NUMBERED, (SOMEONE'S/ SOMETHING'S)

there is only a short time before something ends

1. Judy always comes to work late, and I think the boss is going to fire her soon. Her *days are numbered*.
2. Your old car's *days are numbered*. It's only a matter of time before you have to get a new one.

The expression suggests that the number of days associated with a situation is not indefinite. It is often used about someone facing death or dismissal.

DEAD TO THE WORLD

fast asleep

1. Crystal tried to wake her sons to get them on their way to school, but they had stayed out until well past midnight and now they were *dead to the world*. Nothing could rouse them.
2. I was barely aware that my telephone was ringing in the middle of the night because I was *dead to the world*. I couldn't drag myself out of bed in time to answer it.

DEAL (SOMEONE) IN/OUT

to include someone in something, especially a card game

1. Mary thought their business venture was promising, but she didn't have a lot of money, so she told them to *deal her out*.
2. If you'll excuse me for a moment; I'm going to make a phone call. But I want to play this round of cards, so you can *deal me in*.

The expression originates from the idea of being included or excluded from a hand of cards in a card game like poker, and is still in reference to card games. It is also used figuratively in business ventures and other group activities.

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

an unpolished or unsophisticated person that has potential

1. Liz must have seen that Tim was a *diamond in the rough*, because she asked him out, and now they're getting married.
2. The boss always thought Sarah had little potential for advancement in the company, but he realized she was a *diamond in the rough* when she contributed some very useful ideas at the staff meeting.

The expression suggests an uncut diamond, which is unattractive to the eye but which has the potential of becoming a beautiful stone when properly cut and polished.

DIVIDE THE SPOILS

to give portions of the goods captured during a war to the winners of the war

1. Several centuries ago, it was common practice for invading armies to *divide the spoils* after they had won a battle. Whatever goods they had captured, such as money or livestock, would be divided among themselves to keep.
2. The boys from two rival camps decided to compete for a gallon of ice cream. The winning team would get to *divide the spoils* and the losing team would get nothing.

The expression is used literally in the context of war, but it can also be used figuratively, as in sentence 2.

DO AN ABOUT-FACE

to change one's behavior or mind abruptly and (often) apparently without reason

1. Yesterday, the boss said none of us could take our vacations in June. Then this morning, he *did an about-face* and said we could.
2. At first Ron's parents wouldn't let him have a car, but when they realized how much they would have to drive him around, they *did an about-face*.

The expression originates from the military command "About face!" which instructs a soldier to turn in the opposite direction.

DO OR DIE

to act out of necessity, even if the outcome is unpleasant (sentences 1 and 2) or to try one's hardest despite the likelihood of failure (sentence 3)

1. We decided the time had come to make a decision and act on it. As Harvey said to me, "It's *do or die*."
2. When the time came to mount an attack on the enemy, the captain said, "Men, the time is now. We *do or die*."
3. The boys tried their hardest to succeed. They had a real *do-or-die* attitude.

The expression can function as a noun phrase (sentence 1), a verb (sentence 2), or an adjective (sentence 3). When used as a verb, the expression is never conjugated (i.e., never "does or dies"), and thus is only used with I, we, and they.

DOG DAYS (OF SUMMER)

very hot days

1. Summer in the southern United States is uncomfortably hot and humid. In July and August, we suffer through the *dog days*.
2. I can't stand the *dog days* of summer. Next year I'm going to buy an air conditioner!

The expression has an astronomical source. It is the time in July and August when, in the northern hemisphere, the Dog Star, Sirius, rises in conjunction with the sun. In ancient times it was believed that it was the combined heat of Sirius and the sun that caused the hot weather.

DOG-EARED

well-worn

1. The pages of this library book are really *dog-eared*. A lot of people must have borrowed it and read it.
2. I've put the report in a plastic folder so the pages don't get *dog-eared*.

The expression suggests the idea of a dog's ears, which are pliable and limp, just as the page corners of a book become after extensive fingering and frequent turning.

DOG-EAT-DOG

ruthless, competitive, and fast-paced

1. Ed decided to quit his job in business because everyone seemed so dishonest, trying to get his job and steal his clients. It was a *dog-eat-dog* world.
2. John moved away from New York City to a small town in the Midwest because life in the big city was *dog-eat-dog*.

The expression suggests the idea of animals that are so desperate that they eat their own kind.

DO (SOMEONE) A GOOD TURN

to do someone a favor without having been asked and without expecting a favor in return

1. I contribute to a charity because, when I had very little money and no job, someone once *did me a good turn* and now I want to repay the favor by doing the same for someone else.
2. Sally is very loyal to her company because they had faith in her and *did her a good turn*. They gave her a job when no one else would hire her.

DOT THE I'S AND CROSS THE T'S

to be very careful and attentive to detail

1. We have to make this written proposal the best one they receive. We have to make sure we *dot the i's and cross the t's*.
2. I was in a hurry to get this letter to the lawyer. It was more important to get it mailed today than to *dot the i's and cross the t's*.

The expression probably originates from the idea of being careful to complete the letters "i" and "t" in cursive handwriting to ensure they are clearly identifiable from each other.

DOWN AND OUT

poor

1. Years ago Sam was *down and out*. He had no job and no money.
2. This is a shelter for the *down and out* of the city. The homeless can come here for a hot meal and a place to sleep at night.

The expression suggests the idea of being down at the bottom of society and out of luck.

DOWN IN THE DUMPS

depressed

1. I'm not feeling very cheerful these days. I've been *down in the dumps* for a while.
2. We've been *down in the dumps* ever since our pet cat died. I wonder if getting a new kitten would make us feel better.

Synonyms: *blue*; *down in the mouth*

DOWN IN THE MOUTH

unhappy

1. Jeff has been *down in the mouth* since he lost his job.
2. You look so sad. Why so *down in the mouth*?

Synonyms: *blue*; *down in the dumps*

A reference to the way one's mouth turns downward when one is sad.

DOWN TO EARTH

practical and rational; unpretentious

1. The boss always listens to Ralph's suggestions because his ideas are reasonable and *down-to-earth*.
2. John is just the kind of young man a girl's parents want her to marry. He's so practical and *down-to-earth* about everything.

Synonym: *both feet on the ground*

Antonym: *head in the clouds*

The expression suggests one has one's feet firmly planted on solid ground rather than having unrealistic ideas or flighty behavior.

DOWN TO THE WIRE

to the deadline

1. The newspaper article was due no later than 4 o'clock and the editor got it in at exactly 3:59. He went right *down to the wire*.
2. Some students write their best research papers if they wait until the night before they are due. They leave them until they are *down to the wire*.

Synonym: *eleventh hour*

Compare to: *in the nick of time*; *under the wire*

Whereas *eleventh hour* means late, *down to the wire*, *under the wire* and *in the nick of time* convey the sense of being just barely in time.

DRAW A BLANK

to be unable to remember

1. Charles *drew a blank* when he tried to remember the date of his wedding anniversary. He had to ask his wife when it was.
2. Andrea always *draws a blank* when she runs into people she doesn't know very well. She's never quite sure she has met them before.

Used at least since the 16th century, this idiom originally referred to lottery tickets. One who *drew a blank* had a ticket worth nothing.

DRAW THE LINE AT (SOMETHING)

to not allow something beyond a certain acceptable point

1. Their parents let them go out on weekend nights, but they *draw the line* at letting them go out on school nights.
2. You may buy a car with your savings, but not a motorcycle. I'm going to *draw the line* at that.

The expression suggests the idea of drawing a line to mark an outer limit.

DRESSED TO KILL

dressed to make a strong impression, usually in fancy or stylish clothes

1. I was very embarrassed when I walked into the party thinking it was informal and found that everyone except me was *dressed to kill*.
2. Marjorie wanted to make a lasting impression on John. When he arrived to take her out, she was *dressed to kill*.

DROP IN THE BUCKET, A

an extremely small amount compared to the whole, usually much less than what is needed or wanted

1. We need to raise over one million dollars to fund the new Center for AIDS Research. The thousand dollars we have already collected is just a *drop in the bucket*.
2. What he paid me is only a *drop in the bucket* compared to what he owes me.

DRUM (SOMEONE)/GET DRUMMED OUT OF THE CORPS

to expel someone from a group or organization

1. If I suggested to the boss that the company pay for the Christmas party, he'd probably fire me. I'd *get drummed out of the corps*.
2. When Henry recommended that the men's club should admit women as members, they *drummed him out of the corps*.

The expression originates from a military setting where, when someone left the corps in disgrace, he or she was escorted out with a drum roll. Its usage includes any group and carries with it a sense of disgrace or rejection.

DUTCH TREAT {GO DUTCH}

each person pays for himself or herself; to share the cost

1. Larry didn't have enough money to pay for both his and Mary's dinner, so they went *Dutch treat*.
2. When I go out to lunch with my colleagues at work, each of us pays for herself. We *go Dutch*.

Antonym: *treat*

Whereas the basic expression *treat* means to pay for someone else, *Dutch treat* means that no one is treating. *Dutch treat* is often used in spoken English; in formal, written English, one often sees an expression like "no-host lunch" to indicate that each person pays for his or her own meal.

DYED IN THE WOOL

having a trait that is thoroughly ingrained or basic to one's nature

1. Ron and Ted love baseball. They know all the players on every team and all the statistics about each one. They are *dyed-in-the-wool* baseball fans.
2. No one works harder than Ann for the protection of the environment and wildlife. She is *dyed in the wool* as far as conservation goes.